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Today, our children are entering school dealing with issues that affect learning and their ability to progress through the general curriculum successfully. Many of them do not come to school ready to learn because their very basic needs for self-actualization are not met. Many attend school dealing with stressors that stem from dysfunctional families, divorce, death, homelessness, and mental illnesses that are not diagnosed or properly treated. Public schools have become so “tied in” to ensuring that academic benchmarks are met and test scores are as high as possible so that our districts reach and/or maintain that level 5 endorsement. As parents we push our children to be perfectly well-rounded, high achieving children who participate in every extracurricular activity possible, make the highest grades possible, and conduct community service. We all know that those things look good on a college application. We put our children under this stress, yet we do NOT teach them how to deal with the stress. Our nation is headed towards a mental illness epidemic unless we learn to proactive rather than reactive. A concerted effort needs to be created to educate our communities, school leaders, teachers, and children about how to handle stress and mental disorders before the ultimate result, which is not dropping out of school. Suicide can be the result. I would like to see our state adopt a mandated school program that addresses broad populations of children, families, and schools that focuses on teaching emotional self-regulation and decision-making skills that may result in empowering our children to make better choices. Our teachers and school leaders need to be taught how to recognize risk factors and symptoms of mental illness. Our counselors need to be trained in how to work with the students, faculty, and families in providing resource assistance to at-risk individuals. I speak from the experience, not of an educator, but as a mother who has witnessed mental illness firsthand. You see, on June 13, 2006 my Elisabeth kissed me goodnight and went to her room and, on Wednesday, I found her hanging from her closet rod. Not only had I missed the signs, but her friends and teachers had as well. Suicide is now listed as the 2nd highest cause of death in teens. Are you willing to allow it to climb to number/without attempting to intervene?